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ABSTRACT

On March 5, 1980, the "World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development" (WCS) report was submitted to the Dutch government. The Nature Conservation Education Committee (CNBE) was then asked to prepare another report based on its initial reactions to the WCS, particularly to section 13, which deals with education. Therefore, the committee set up an ad hoc working party to consider the fundamental aspects of the relationship between environmental education (EE) in the Netherlands and global problems. These considerations are reported in this document. Areas addressed include: the CNBE and the WCS; the nature of EE education; EE as a strategic task; short term and long term approaches--action versus education; EE and global tension; lines of demarcation related to EE in the Netherlands; and target groups. Nine recommendations are also included. For example, it is recommended that environmental education include not only nature conservation in the sense of protecting wildlife but also the problems of energy and mineral resources (which are completely absent from section 13 in the WCS) and that local concrete situations (such as problems of weedkillers and pesticides) be used to illustrate global relationships and foster global awareness. (JN)

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THE WORLD CONSERVATION STRATEGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Nature Conservation Education Committee
Rijswijk, September 1981
The Netherlands

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Introduction

On 5 March 1980 the report "World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development", compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), was submitted to the Dutch Government. In a letter of 7 July to the State Secretary for Cultural Affairs, Recreation and Social Work the Nature Conservation Education Committee (CNBE) gave its initial reaction to the report, in particular to section 13, which deals with education. On behalf of the State Secretary the Head of the Coordination and Policy Development Division (now the General Policy Affairs Department) asked the Committee in a letter of 20 August 1980 to prepare a report.
This matter was discussed extensively at a meeting on 19 March 1981. In a letter of 17 March 1981 the Director of General Policy Affairs repeated his request for a report, with special reference to the need for the Netherlands to formulate a standpoint for the General Assembly of the IUCN in October 1981, where the WCS was to be discussed.

At the meeting on 19 March 1981 the Committee decided to set up an ad hoc working party to consider the fundamental aspects of the relationship between environmental education in the Netherlands and the global problems. The working party comprised Messrs Bleyerveld, Hovius, Van Mensch and Schroevers.
Mr Bleyerveld was obliged to withdraw owing to lack of time.
The Committee unanimously endorsed the working party's draft report at a meeting on 10 September 1981.

1. THE COMMITTEE AND THE WCS

Section IV, paragraphs 1.6 and 6 of the Committee's "Recommendations on a plan for education concerning the natural environment and the valuable man-made environment", known as the Yellow Report (Rijswijk, 1975), specifically mentioned the global perspective, albeit not in great detail. In practice, however, this played only a very small part in the Committee's work.

There are two fundamental differences between the WCS and the Committee's Yellow Report. The WCS regards nature merely as a backcloth to human action; nature protection is part and parcel of the protection of man's economic interests. The Yellow Report sees nature as also having an intrinsic value. Again, the WCS passes over the economic and political causes of the present environmental problems. The Yellow Report notes that the environmental problem is a social problem related to the functioning and organization of society as a whole (p. 2).

In view of these differences and the fact that it is now six years since the Yellow Report was published, the Committee decided it was worthwhile to include a general discussion of environmental education in its comments on the educational section of the WCS.

2. WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION?

Environmental education is generally defined, as is the case in Section 13 of the WCS, as the fostering or acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the relationship between man and nature with the idea that attitudes and behaviour will automatically change as a result (WCS, Section 13, paragraphs 1 and 2). In practice this difinition has been found to give rise to misunderstandings.

In the WCS environmental education plays a limited role alongside many other strategic instruments (science, economy, technology etc.). This in fact subordinates it to the "harder" issues.

In this view knowledge and understanding serve to enable people to play a part in a technocratic decision-making process (WCS, Section 13, paragraph 4), i.e. to make them willing to find their place in the play of interacting economic factors and technical solutions to the problems created by their interaction.

In practice, too, we find that the "information" function strongly predominates. The WCS in fact makes no distinction between information (helping to create knowledge) and education (deepening knowledge, creating, understanding and helping to shape attitudes and behaviour).

Present-day environmental education would seem to be an excellent example of an activity designed to make people remember that there is such a thing as nature, which is beautiful and worthy of respect, and to which we have obligations. In this way knowledge of its structures and understanding of its processes can result in a strategy which integrates the interests of nature in those of man, or man's economy, which is ultimately what matters to society. This is clearly reflected in the objective of the WCS, "to help advance the achievement of sustainable development through the conservation of living resources" (WCS, p. IV).

The Committee does not agree with this view. The relationship between nature and man embraces much more than a statement of this kind would suggest. Nature is not a backcloth to human action, i.e. economic action; it has its own identity and its own interests, which, in the long term, weigh much more heavily and are much stronger than human interests. Still more importantly, man is dependent on nature in all his actions. What we call "culture" is nothing more nor less than our use of the opportunities nature (in the widest sense) offers us to apply certain ideas outside the natural order. This is true of all human activities: art, scientific study, technology, the organization of society, personal relations. Thus "nature" is an aspect of all human activities, including man's science, economy and politics.
We could say that this is the main difference between conservation education and environmental education: conservation education is confined to the concept of nature as an independent entity which man may or may not be able to influence, whereas environmental education is concerned with man's environment, the circumstances which make life agreeable, or even possible, for man.

The Committee takes the view that environmental education should strengthen understanding of the relationship man has with the total environment, with everything around him.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AS A STRATEGIC TASK

This "everything" makes the task of environmental education much more onerous than is usually stated and than described in the WCS.

It should sow the seed of a new human awareness. To do this a number of barriers of a social nature have to be removed. There is a desirable form of social intercourse which can be contrasted with the present one; this makes it clear what the differences are and what steps have to be taken.

A characteristic of present-day society is the way it solves social conflicts with the aid of technology (the "technocratic compromise"). Technology bases its search for solutions on principles and experience of scientific origin. The problem-solving role in conflict situations is thus assigned to experts qualified by their talents and training.

In a system of this kind the role of the educator is twofold:
(a) he must create a framework from which the experts can be drawn, and
(b) he must provide citizens with a basic knowledge which teaches them to accept and distinguish between the expertise of others.

This is the "information" function, which, as we have already noted, strongly predominates, wrongly in the Committee's opinion. The process which brings about growth of understanding and of opportunities for action is cumulative: experience can be processed and stored until it is necessary. It is also divided into disciplines. It is not necessary for everyone to share every type of experience; the more expert one is, the smaller the field in which one can make pronouncements.

The world is becoming more and more aware that this way of going about things is not always satisfactory. The "integral approach" seems to have been discredited. By tackling every problem separately, however, problems can only be mastered locally and temporarily, and new problems are created in the process, which in turn require solutions - the "poverty spiral" maintained by an economic system based on continuous growth. The problems of both the environment and development can be described as symptoms of this development, and the strategic importance of environmental education must accordingly be regarded as an attempt to call a halt to the disastrous spiral of growth. However important it may often be to solve

urgent individual problems in the field of social relations in the short and long term ,strategies based on a divided approach are impracticable for a long-term plan.

Decisions should not be dependent on science and technology (WCS, Section 12); their guidelines and methods should be the product of a social system which respects man and nature (the "political compromise"). Social problems are then solved using social ideas, which should not be delegated to experts. If it is democracy we want, each citizen should have a minimum of understanding of the all-embracing nature of the problems.

In this system the role of the educator is completely different from his role in present-day society: it is not a question of fields of knowledge which can be developed independently of one another and have only local and temporary significance, but of an overall view which may be at different levels but is aimed at one goal, to solve social problems using social ideas.

To summarize the role of the educator:

(a) everyone is concerned with the same ideas; these ideas cannot be delegated;

(b) it is a question not of a cumulative but of a deepening and consequently continuous process, an "éducation permanente".

The significance of an educational process in this sense is to help change ideas about the relationship between man and the environment, which, in times of economic recession, may mean a change in social orientation. The function of environmental education is to overcome the alienation of nature which has been caused by the divided approach to reality and makes a truly "ecologically sound" life impossible.

4. SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM: ACTION VERSUS EDUCATION

The WCS says as little about the relationship between action and education as it does about the relationship between information and education. The Committee takes the view that the strategy for environmental education is a long-term one. The aim is

not to force through concrete concessions in a war of interests, but to bring about a change in attitude so that social changes can take place in the future. Not until social changes have been made can the technical and practical advances be integrated logically into the structures. This is a process which will take a long time. We cannot say when the change will come - or even if it will come or be forestalled by catastrophy, war or the like. The only thing we can cling to is the recognition that understanding and the right attitude are necessary and it is therefore worthwhile to work on environmental education.

These are problems, however, which demand a short-term approach. These are not separate from education in the sense indicated above; many large-scale problems do not permit us to wait until people have seen the light. Some of them - for example the threat to the tropical rain forests - are so urgent that irreparable damage will be caused if something does not happen quickly. Others have an immediate practical significance, e.g. water purification. It would be unrealistic to avoid them. It is good to take action to tackle these problems, but it must be realized that their apparent solution (combating the symptoms without removing the cause) means recognizing their existence. This too requires the right attitude and, therefore, education.

Another more concrete step is the formation of an "anticulture". In the society of the future new technologies, new ways of dealing with nature, new forms of energy use will be needed. The development of this mode of living will not in itself bring about the necessary change, but it is a precondition for that change. Here again the combination of short-term action (survival strategies, soft technology) and long-term action (education) is essential.

Connections of this kind are an absolute necessity in the educational process. Education which does not make these connections operates at such an abstract level that it will appeal to only a small minority. What it amounts to is that the aims of campaigning and

education can be regarded as opposing in many respects: the short-term and the long-term are incompatible, but at the same time they are indispensable to each other. Education should arise from campaigning, from support for things which affect the immediate surroundings in which people live. But it needs to go further : the aims of campaigning must be seen in a global and long-term perspective; only then is it emancipatory and worthy of the name "education". Only then will environmental education in a WCS be worthwhile because it places development problems and environmental problems in the same context. This is, however, no easy task.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND GLOBAL TENSION

We are accustomed to dividing the world into a "developed" and an "underdeveloped" part. The aim of a global economic policy should be to abolish underdevelopment. To do this a process of growth is necessary; the developed countries start projects in the rest of the world with the aim of creating economic activities to bring this about.

More and more it is realized, however, that the domestic problems of the West cannot be separated from the problems of development. It would be more accurate, therefore, to speak of both "underdevelopment" and "overdevelopment". The fact that the moves towards a world-embracing economy originate in only a small part of the world is directly linked to the fact that there is extravagant wastage in that part of the world, with the associated environmental problems, while elsewhere starvation and poverty dominate and the land is suffering irreparable damage as a result of deforestation and erosion. Development problems and Western environmental problems are two sides of the same coin. Anyone looking for ways to solve one of them cannot avoid looking at them together and including both in a plea of action.

We take development projects for granted in which a slice of Western activity and know-how is transferred to countries which can make good use of it. But if the precondition for aid programmes of this kind is a good balance of payments, such projects do not help, since the donors derive their relative wealth from the conditions which are ultimately found in the developing countries themselves.

Would it not be more sensible for the rich countries to try to stand on their own feet a little more, in other words to set their own house in order, thus giving the rest of the world a chance to rediscover its own autonomy? Conversely, the way in which the overdeveloped world takes for granted the availability of aluminium from Surinam, copper from Chili, soya from Argentina or coffee from Angola is much more open to question than, for instance, the need for nuclear energy for aluminium processing, purification plants for masses of waste materials. and nature reserves which vainly try to preserve flora and fauna against growing pollution - all the inconveniences we like to regard as "environmental problems". Things are not that simple, unfortunately. The principle of absolute self-sufficiency for each country would result in starvation in many places, and the interdependence that exists now cannot be abolished in a day. A certain amount of interdependence on a basis of equality is normal, and developing countries can, of course, learn a great deal from the experience of the West. It is clear, however, that neither economic relations nor the development projects which consolidate them can be regarded as a strategy for the future. This requires a change in the economic structures which determine the relationship between the West and the rest of the world. This process can only be brought about if the economic structures of the overdeveloped world are changed and legislation is introduced to guide them. Underdeveloped countries suffer more at the hands of overdeveloped countries than vice versa; this shows how much the attitude of inhabitants of the overdeveloped world affects the fortunes of the whole world.

The problems of the Third World are far from the thoughts of the average inhabitant of the overdeveloped world. He cannot regard them as anything more than abstract, distant problems, which occasionally impinge upon his senses through the medium of television. Nevertheless his behaviour helps to create a world, two-thirds of whose population is starving. How difficult it is for him to realize what relationship there is between him and the outside world; how difficult it is for him to <u>do</u> anything about it; but environmental education which finds its subject matter in his immediate surroundings and tries to point out the sources of problems can help him. It can shape his awareness and show ways of taking action.

The first prerequisite for a global strategy is global education, by which the Committee understands establishing a relationship between one's own situation and the rest of the world. This is what environmental education must be in a world-embracing strategy.

6. THE LINES OF DEMARCATION

As regards environmental education in the Netherlands a distinction can be made between :

(1) information and education provided by Dutch organizations and individuals to Dutch target groups concerning the Dutch situation;
(2) information and education provided by Dutch organizations and individuals to Dutch target groups concerning the situation elsewhere in the world; and
(3) information and education provided by foreign organizations and individuals to Dutch target groups concerning the situation elsewhere in the world.

The Committee has traditionally been concerned with (1). Owing in part to the WCS, (2) is receiving more and more attention. It will be clear from the above that the Committee takes the view that environmental education can be defined as a means of making people aware, by studying local natural and environmental conditions, that these give rise to global structures.

The activating impulse which proceeds from an approach of this kind is concerned not with solving a specific problem locally and temporarily, but with enabling ordinary people to share in global structures and creating the right conditions for some changes to be made in these structures. This is a form of politicization; it is the logical consequence of combining environmental and development problems.

One of the first conclusions to be drawn from a standpoint of this kind is that we should direct WCS activities towards conditions in our own country. Another item which could be added to the approaches within environmental education listed above might be "information and education provided by Dutch organizations and individuals to foreign target groups concerning the local

situation". An attitude of this kind would, however, be very presumptuous when Western expansion has forced its own attitude to life on the world at large.

"Materialist" arguments can be put forward to support the view that the Western world should be concerned primarily with the situation at home as outlined above; environmental problems can be the result of overdevelopment as well as of underdevelopment. Although the distinction is not absolute (local instances of overdevelopment are also found in developing countries) we can be sure that the problems of the West can differ considerably from those of the rest of the world. Awareness only of one's own environmental problems, then, is no guarantee of the right strategy. On the other hand, the influence of overdeveloped countries on underdeveloped countries is greater than that of underdeveloped countries over overdeveloped countries (the problem of the asymmetry of power). This means that in the long term moderation in the West's management of resources will benefit the Third World more than direct development aid.

The recognition that environmental problems derive from the problems of the world as a whole demands a great deal of environmental education. In this sense environmental education is all-embracing, it concerns everyone and should take place everywhere. The considerations indicated show how it should be restricted functionally and regionally : it should be concerned with the concrete situation in the home country, taking concrete natural and environmental phenomena as its point of departure. There is no other way. The skill is in bringing out the global aspects of their limited effects and from this drawing motives for action.

7. TARGET GROUPS

To initiate global processes the whole population must be motivated; only then can political strategies be developed to give direction to the future.

Traditional nature and environmental education are particularly directed at people who are concerned for the workings of nature around us (landscape, flora and fauna) or try to instil this concern in young childeren. The latter aspect is very important and certainly conforms with the principles outlined above, but for our purpose - and for the urgency of the matter - it is too modest.

Modern Western man's sensitivity to nature is subject to so many attacks by economic and technocratic forces during his life that he has to be strong to resist its suppression. Furthermore, a sensitivity to nature which is not integrated cannot form part of a strategy to transform the world : for this purpose comparison with other types of values is necessary. These are the consequences of, and conditions for, an "éducation permanente".

Although the Committee regards the existing activities as very important, it would also like to urge the necessity of a strategy which incorporates environmental problems in the totality of social problems as an essential part - inseparable from matters such as the Third World, armaments, unemployment and many others - and which should be included in ethical and moral discussions of a political or religious nature. Programmes must be drawn up to make this possible in schools and other educational institutions in the Netherlands. This method, as far as the Committee is aware, is one that has never yet been used anywhere in the world. The WCS offers an opportunity to do something about this.

Finally the Committee would like to emphasize that these considerations represent a long-term strategy. It is quite possible in the case of very acute problems that direct involvement in the internal affairs of a developing country may be desirable, but this would be a departure from the educational contribution the Committee has in mind.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Section 13 of the WCS contains a number of more or less concrete recommendations, divided into nine paragraphs, which have a rather strongly ad hoc nature. It will be clear from the above that the Committee notes the absence of any realization of the relationship between short-term campaigning and long-term education and the relationship between environmental problems and social (economic, political) structures. In the Committee's view all educational programmes should ultimately be designed to make people ask themselves whether solutions can be found within the existing social structures, or in other words, whether an economy based on continuous growth is necessary or desirable.

2. To this end environmental problems must be brought into all social discussions, i.e. wherever social matters are discussed (trade unions, religious and quasi-religious organizations, political parties etc).

3. Continual emphasis must be placed on the environmental problem as a social problem, i.e. environmental problems must not be dealt with in isolation. This certainly applies to education at all levels. The social and natural sciences should be more integrated. If an interdisciplinary approach is not possible, it should be the aim to deal with environmental problems from different angles (different disciplines), with interaction between them. In this context physical geography should play a more important part in Dutch schools than is the case at present.

4. Environmental education must include not only nature conservation in the sense of the protection of flora and fauna but also the problems of energy and mineral resources. These aspects are completely absent from the section on education in the WCS.

5. Local concrete situations must be used to illustrate global relationships and foster global awareness. Examples of such situations are energy prices and the problems of weedkillers and pesticides.

6. The overall view of environmental education described above should be introduced not only in schools but also in the institutions traditionally concerned with nature and environmental education such as natural history museums and botanical and zoological gardens.

7. A National Centre could play an important part in supporting the development of environmental education as described above. It should be able to provide not only methodological and technical assistance but also subject matter.

8. There is a lack of good information on the global relationship between environmental and development problems : this should be provided by, or with the assistance of, the National Centre.

9. Information is not enough, however; this should be followed by an educational process.